

**Speech delivered by Hon. Reverdy Johnson, as
peresident of the Democratic Conservative mass
meeting, held in Baltimore, Sept. 15th, 1875.**

SPEECH DELIVERED BY HON. REVERDY JOHNSON, AS PRESIDENT OF THE
DEMOCRATIC Conservative Mass Meeting, HELD IN Baltimore, Sept. 15, 1875.

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SPEECH.

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Fellow Citizens!

Before submitting the resolutions which it is proposed you shall consider, or introducing to you the gentlemen who are to address you, I beg your permission to trespass upon your time for a brief period with some remarks of my own. The elections, municipal and State, which are the immediate subjects of your attention, are intrinsically important, and, are additionally so by the bearing they will have upon the next Presidential election.

In relation to the municipal election, I do not understand that any objection has been made or can be made to the Democratic candidate for the Mayoralty, Ferdinand C. Latrobe. His capacity, his perfect integrity, his interest in the city, are ample guarantees that, if elected, he will discharge the duties of the office ably and faithfully. Nor do I understand that any objection has been made or can be made to your candidates for the offices of Governor,

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Attorney General, or Comptroller. No one who knows them can doubt the ability of John Lee Carroll, Charles J. M. Gwinn, or Levin Woolford. What then are the grounds of the opposition to these candidates? The first general ground, as I am informed, is, that they were nominated by what is called the Ring, and that the supposed Ring, was guilty 4 of contrivance or fraud in the election of the two conventions, by which the nominations were made. But beside this, there is said to be a particular objection to Mr. Carroll, because of his religious faith, that is to say, because he is a Roman Catholic.

A few words under both these heads:

1st. If, by Ring is meant an assemblage of men organized to achieve a common purpose, then the objection is alike applicable to all such associations. In the practical affairs of life, whether concerning politics or business, combinations are not only common, but are often indispensable to success. To refer to no other, what are the national conventions for the nomination of presidential candidates? These conventions are in one sense rings, and have often inner rings, that is to say, separate combinations desirous to promote the interest of different candidates. What was the nature of the meeting at Masonic Temple, on Tuesday, the 7th inst. Was not that a Ring?

The purpose, of those calling the meeting, was to unite for a common end; and to make their union successful, they appointed a committee of twenty-five to select among the persons nominated for city offices by other bodies, such as they might find to be honest and capable. No one can question the honesty with which that meeting was held, or the good ends which it intended to attain. This they propose to do, by purging the antecedent nominations of all improper persons, so as to present honest and capable men for the support of the people. That this was a combination or that it was a laudable one, no one can doubt.

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Finally, what was the character of the combinations, by which the nomination for Mayor was determined upon and made, at the late meeting at the Maryland Institute? If there be anything obnoxious in combinations for a political object, it must be in the secrecy in which their proceedings are conducted. And these were held in secret, watchwords were said to be adopted, and sentinels placed at the door, to prevent the entrance of any who could not give the countersign. The danger attending such secret associations the people of the country know too well. Citizens of foreign birth, and those, whether native or foreign, holding the Roman Catholic faith, were politically ostracised and the most inhuman violence resorted to, to enforce Know-Nothing decrees. The streets of Philadelphia, Louisville, New Orleans and Baltimore were made to run red with the blood of the ostracised. "America to be ruled by Americans," was the cry against naturalized citizens and the sacred name of religion, was invoked, under which, to abuse and murder catholics. Without meaning to insinuate that such outrages are contemplated by the party who now meet in secret, yet there is in the history of the past, enough to alarm all whose desire is peace, and that every man should be protected in his rights, civil and religious. That such a party as this last should object to the conventions by whom your municipal and State nominations have been made, seems to be absolutely ludicrous. And yet it is from it that the objection mainly proceeds. Nothing is more true than that political parties cannot, be maintained except by 6 resorting to some mode to effect union. That this can only be done by compromising opinions so as to promote the general object, is in the nature of things clear, and is demonstrated to be true by all experience.

Party triumphs depend as much upon discipline, as triumphs on the battle-field. An undisciplined political party can never succeed against one that is disciplined. Discipline therefore is imperatively necessary, if a party is to be sustained. There may be and no doubt often are, bad men in all political parties, and they may for a time obtain control. But to abandon the party on that account, would be as foolish as to cut down a fine tree, because one of its limbs was unhealthy. To cut down the limb and thereby preserve the tree is the proper course. Where the general members of the party are honest and

Library of Congress

capable, the control of bad or incapable men can never be other than merely temporary. There is an innate strength in a virtuous purpose that in the end proves too much for the corrupt trickster.

2d. The particular objection to Mr. Carroll is, that he is a Roman Catholic.

His fitness for the office of Governor, unless this makes him unfit, no one questions or can question. His blood, like his faith, descends from one of the immortal signers of the Declaration of Independence, who was from the first to the last universally respected and esteemed, and who died revered and beloved by the good of every religious denomination. No man was so stupid or intolerant as to object to him on account of his faith. If, when he was attaching his name to the great charter of American liberty, any member of the body had objected to his right to do so, because he was a catholic, the objection would have been treated with scorn and detestation. No such objection was interposed, and his union with the other of those great and pure men, was received with joy and approval, as tending to strengthen the great cause on which they had embarked. Is it not marvellous, that in this age of the world, and particularly in this country, such an objection should be countenanced by any sane man? I say especially in this country, because our ancestors were so impressed with the duty and necessity of not interfering politically with any man on account his religious faith, that in one of the first amendments to the Constitution, that were coeval with it, they provided that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." And it is believed that a like provision is contained in every State constitution.

But have we had no Marylander besides Charles Carroll of Carrollton, whose life, character and services speak aloud against this intolerance? Yes, we have had one in the person of the late Chief Justice, Roger B. Taney. His whole career, professional, legislative, executive and judicial, proves how gross would be the wrong done the country if we acted upon any such un constitutional and wicked folly.

But what is the religious faith whose followers some would consign to political servitude. It is the religion of Jesus.

8

Every Roman Catholic believes in it as firmly, as any one belonging to other religious sects. They have a different mode of worship. So have other sects. But the essentials of the faith, are common to all. They believe in the Divinity of Jesus, in the Trinity and in the Atonement. What is the most reasonable mode of worship men may and do differ about, but all Christians believe in these essentials of the faith. Have Catholics ever failed to be good citizens? All the duties of life, public and private, they discharge as fully as all other Christians. During the war of our Revolution and the one of 1812 with England, and that of 1846 with Mexico, they hazarded life and fortune to maintain the principles, which produced the first, and to maintain the rights of our government, in the two last. They stood shoulder to shoulder with Protestants on every battle-field, which was often literally mired with their common blood.

This exclusion from political rights for many long years prevailed in England to her dishonor and disgrace. It continued for a long time in consequence of the insane obstinacy of George III. But better counsels now prevail. The enlightened men of the present day in that country, have seen the injustice of such an exclusion and have removed the shackles which enforced it. One of these statesmen, however, a gentleman of rare ability and consummate scholarship, the Rt. Honorable W. E. Gladstone, is waging a war of pamphlets with Roman Catholic Bishops, which is calculated to revive to some extent, the political intolerance of the past. I have no doubt that, he 9 thinks, he is doing what will promote the interests of his country and secure its safety. His doctrine is that the civil and political allegiance of the Catholic, is due first to the Pope rather than to the government under which he resides and is protected. This, in my judgment, is a gross error as applied to the present century. There may be found in some of the publications issued from the Vatican, passages which, taken literally by themselves, will sanction the

Library of Congress

view of Mr. Gladstone, but the history of England proves, that the Catholic subjects of the crown, have never failed, in peace or in war, to assert and maintain the rights and honor of England. They constituted a considerable portion of the army with which Wellington succeeded in overcoming the mighty power of Napoleon, and were ever in the van of those who achieved the glorious victories up to the crowning one of Waterloo. And this these Catholics did to preserve Protestant England, against Catholic France, nine-tenths of whose people were Catholics. But if Mr. Gladstone is right that Catholics sincerely believe that their paramount civil allegiance is to the government of Rome, he ought to maintain the necessity of resorting to the measures, which were the disgrace of England for so many years, their exclusion from all political place. For, holding such an allegiance makes them aliens and like other aliens they should not be suffered to participate in the government of England. That this is the sequence of his doctrine no logician can doubt, and Mr. Gladstone is a logician of the highest cast. And yet, so far, he does not propose such an exclusion. 2

10

Considering all these things, I should think that the American, aware of them, when proposing to exclude the Catholic from political office because of his religion, would blush scarlet from very shame. But in addition to what I have said, every theological student knows that the truths of christianity have never been more ably maintained than by Catholic writers, nor have its beauties been more charmingly or effectively presented to the human heart than by Catholic Chateaubriand in his "Genius of Christianity." Christianity itself is at war with all such intolerant doctrines. It has been well and truly said, that, "by inculcating the precept of universal love of mankind, it raised the narrow spirit of patriotism to the extended feeling of general philanthropy," and that, "it laid the foundation for the peace of the world, through the doctrine of reconciliation of men with God and with each other." The doctrine of the infallibility of the head of that church, recently brought prominently before the public, is not a new doctrine, the whole meaning of it, as I understand it, is that the members of the church, assume as true, the religious doctrines

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pronounced from time to time by its governing head. Most of the other religious sects have forms of church government and take their doctrines from what they are declared to be by such governments. But there is nothing in this which shows a want of true Christianity; and then too, how sadly weakened would be the glorious army of Christians, without the Roman Catholics. They constitute a number far greater than that of all other sects combined. In conclusion, then, 11 on this head, I hope for the honor of our State and the reputation of our people, that no citizen will fail to support Mr. Carroll, only because of his religious faith.

3d. But, it is said that the debt of the City has been greatly increased under the Democratic Administrations of Mayors Banks and Vansant, and that for this increase the Party is alone responsible. A few words will show how unjust this charge is. The Republican party obtained the control of the City in 1863 or 1864, when Mr. Chapman was elected Mayor. They were substituted in 1867, by the election of Mr. Banks and Democratic Councils. When this occurred the floating debt was \$1,929,866.94. The funded debt then was \$22,762,622.73. The Democrats had, of course, to provide for both of these obligations, and this could only be done by borrowing or by taxation. They committed, I think, an error in not levying a tax adequate to the purpose. To have done this would have required a levy of \$2.20 on the \$100. And the necessity for such an increase would have been solely owing to the floating debt just referred to. Such a levy, I have always understood, and have reason to believe was advised by Mayor Banks. The tax rate in 1867, the Republicans being still in power, was \$1.40. What is the present debt? If greater, now, than it was then, for what and how has it been contracted? And what is the present rate of taxation? First the debt, in the aggregate, is \$32,095,725.77. Of that sum, \$8,104,500, was contracted since 1867, under votes of the people LC 12 to whom the matter was referred by laws of the State. Deducting this there is left a balance of \$23,991,225.77; against which the City holds investments which yield to her at least six per cent. upon \$25,837,754.82.* This leaves a debt to be met by taxation of only \$6,257,970.95.

* The following are the items of Investment referred to:

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Mortgage on B. & O. R. R. \$ 5,000,000 00

Stock in B. & O R. R., 32,500 shares @ 1.75 5,687,500 00

Debt due by Pittsburg & Connellsville R. R. Co., guaranteed by B. & O. 1,000,000 00

Mortgage on York & Cumberland R. R. 500,000 00

Mortgage on Union R. Rd. Co. 117,000 00

Turnpike Co. Stocks 6,500 00

Sinking Funds 5,936,566 23

Water Loan, (Int. paid by Water Rents,) 5,000,000 00

Park Loans, (Int. paid by Pass. Railways,) 755,566 25

Market Houses, Wharf property, and Real Estate, paying rental, \$110,077.34 1,834,622 34

\$ 25,837,754 82

A strange misapprehension seems to exist in the minds of some, even merchants, that profitable investments increase the debt of those who make them instead of being sources of gain. Does a merchant who has funds not required by his business add to his debts by investing his surplus in profitable stocks? Certainly not. And, yet, this is what the City has done, and it has done it for the purpose of benefiting the people.

The improvements for which this money was advanced were Railroads, Turnpikes, Parks, Water Supply, and other like matters, all of which increase the trade of the City and promote its interest and wealth.

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Now, as to the taxation. It was, as before stated, \$1.40 in 1867, when the Republicans were in power, and it is now \$1.80. What has caused this increase? The eight millions referred to, of which the floating debt left by the Republicans is part, bears an interest of six per cent., and has to be met by taxation. To pay the interest thereon, requires a tax of about 20 cents on the LB 13 \$100. And this accounts within twenty cents, for the increase of the Republican tax of \$1.40 in 1867. The result must be admitted to be that the financial condition of the city is not only as good, but better than that of any of the large cities of the country.

Nor, is there anything startling or alarming in the rate of taxation here, as compared with that of other cities. For example, in 1874, taxes were as follows: In New York, \$2.80; in Philadelphia, \$2.20; in Cincinnati, \$2.33. All these cities are understood to be in a prosperous condition.

If this view be correct, (and upon examination I am sure it will be found so,) the apprehensions which are entertained by some good men cannot but be seen by themselves, to be groundless, if they investigate the subject. And in conclusion on this head, there is one fact which proves the confidence of the public in the City—which is, that its six per cent. stock is readily sold at from three to four and even six per cent. premium. A remark or two, in relation to the financial condition of the State.

I do not recollect exactly what is the amount of her debt—a portion of it was, no doubt, contracted during the war. The charge that unnecessary extravagance, amounting, it is said, to corruption, has characterized the State Government since it came into Democratic hands is made in general terms, and cannot, therefore, be specifically met. It is a mere railing accusation, easily made, but impossible to be refuted except by positive denial. In the words of Mr. Webster when meeting 14 an insinuated charge of want of loyalty to his country, a railing accusation, is “an imputation without time, fact, or circumstance.” But it is conclusive evidence that there is no want of confidence in the management of the State finances, that her stock sells at a premium of from six to ten per cent., depending upon the

Library of Congress

character of her different stocks, some of them being payable at an earlier and some at a later date.

Fellow Citizens, it is possible, and perhaps probable, that there may be bad men in the Democratic party in office in this State, as well as in other states, but the way to deal with the fact, is to expel them, and not to abandon the party. Such men have been found in the Republican ranks—and their conduct has been brought to public view and public indignation as well in Congress as in the District of Columbia and elsewhere. And, yet, the Republicans would consider it a gross outrage to charge the party with their misdeeds.

Whatever ground there may be for imputing misconduct to individual members of the City Council since 1867, I do not believe that any intelligent and fair minded citizen has ever challenged the integrity of Mayors Banks and Vansant. On the contrary their integrity has been admitted and their devotion to the interests of the city conceded. The only objection that I have ever heard urged against Mayor Vansant, is that he was not progressive enough. His fault was stated to be that he does not see how certain it is that expenditures of money for any improvement are sure to benefit the city. It is no doubt true that he watches the treasury with a never ceasing vigilance, and that his object is to save the people from any unnecessary taxation. He may not be as far seeing as the friends of progress, but if he falls short, he errs on the right side as far as taxation is involved. Assuming now as possible that the Republicans may get the control of the city, what will they do with the present rate of taxation? To reduce it would be, to that extent, to leave a portion of the city's engagements unliquidated and that would be repudiation and a dishonor to the city, greatly injurious to its financial credit. No merchant who is alive to his own honor would for a moment sustain a party that would adopt such a measure.

Lastly. I have before said that intrinsically important as our local elections are, they possess an additional importance in the bearing they will have upon the next presidential election. Should your nominees for Mayor, Governor, Attorney General and Comptroller be defeated, encouragement will be given to the now waning prospects of the Republican

Library of Congress

Party. Maryland and Baltimore,—Republican—will be said to be conclusive evidence that the people are being satisfied with the wisdom and purity of the administration of the general government, that credit Mobillier and Pacific Mail corruption are forgotten or not credited; that the President was right in dismissing by force from the legislature of Louisiana a part of its members, and was right in his avowed purpose to overturn by force the legally adopted Constitution of Arkansas, and was right in not condemning the course intended to have been pursued by Gen. 16 Sheridan in three Southern States, to try by drum-head Court Martial thousands of their citizens upon the allegation that they were bandetti; and was also right in not rebuking the Secretary of War for telegraphing Sheridan that “the President and all of us approve of your course.”

It is, therefore, the clear duty of every Marylander who loves his State and country to give no vote which shall encourage the party now in power in Washington. It seems to me to be most extraordinary that any reflecting man should fail to perceive that a continuance in power of the present dominant party is not only pregnant with danger to our material interests, but to the very forms of Government under which, for so many years, we have lived in prosperity and peace.

Do, then, as I am sure you will, roll up such majorities for your candidates as was recently done by your Democratic associates in California for theirs, thus carrying dismay and assuring a signal defeat to the present dominant party and satisfying the good men of all parties that our institutions will be preserved from farther encroachment, and enlightened liberty maintained!